



AN OVERVIEW OF INTERPRETATION IN TOURISM AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Nowadays, becoming environmentally sustainable has become crucial to developing tourism. The task of directing tourism activities towards the ideal of sustainability can also be served through the use of interpretation. The aim of this study is to conduct a literature review in the field of interpretation in tourism in order to highlight its role in the destination management equation and its contribution to sustainable tourism development. The literature highlights the critical role of interpretation in improving knowledge and raising awareness of the importance of environmental protection by tourists in the destination visited. Many studies have also highlighted the different impact that verbal and non-verbal interpretation can have on the degree of involvement of tourists in environmental protection activities in the destination. From a managerial point of view, tourism decision-makers should consider including interpretation activities in the marketing strategy of the tourist destination, with the aim of increasing tourists' involvement in environmental protection activities, which has a significant impact on the tourist experience, but also on tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

JEL classification: Z32, L83, Q01

Key words: interpretation in tourism, sustainable development

1. INTRODUCTION

Although we can talk about the existence of tourism since ancient times, it is only with the development of infrastructure and accessibility of transport services that tourism has become an industry. Places with significant tourism potential have become internationally known destinations, which have aroused interest and desire to be visited. The World Tourism



Organization has reported over 900 million arrivals for 2022, slightly less than the 1.5 billion arrivals reported in 2019 before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presence of tourists in a destination generates economic benefits, but in addition to economic benefits, tourism activity has social and environmental impacts. Tourism can be a good example of how more customers (tourists) do not always generate directly proportional benefits. Uncontrolled visitor numbers can lead to environmental degradation and an increase in the destination's carbon footprint, as well as affecting the social lives of local people. Damage to the natural and man-made heritage and the development of the resilience of the local population leads, over time, to a deterioration of the tourism product and consequently to a reduction in the attractiveness of the destination.

The solution to this situation, where the aim is to develop tourism and maximize economic benefits while minimizing the impact on the natural, cultural, and social environment, lies in the ability to embrace sustainability as a fundamental value in destination development.

The concept of sustainability has been formally established by the United Nations. The 1987 report entitled *Our Common Future* or the *Brundtland Report* states that *sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. Sustainability thus replaces a narrow concern for oneself and one's immediate descendants with a broad, idealistic vision of the well-being of all future generations.

In this context, sustainable approaches have become desirable in all sectors, including the tourism industry, which is responsible for about 8% of greenhouse gas pollution (Lenzen et al., 2018). The success of tourism destinations depends on the tourism product and the way it is managed, and it is desirable as tourism activities have the potential to generate significant economic benefits. From this point of view, tourism development must be managed to ensure the sustainability of the destination. This means preserving the natural and man-made heritage, but also ensuring visitor satisfaction and benefits for the stakeholders. Balance seems to be the key to many situations, including the management of a tourist destination. More customers does not always mean better results or the optimum solution, and the tourism industry is a very good example of how sometimes there can be too much. In the case of the tourism industry, too many tourists can alter the environment, the well-being of the locals and the general image of the destination.



Sustainability in tourism is about ensuring the long-term viability of destinations, but one of the conditions for the successful implementation of sustainable development is the involvement of as many stakeholders as possible. On one hand, stakeholders' needs must be identified to ensure that tourism development benefits them, but on the other hand, each stakeholder must take ownership of the direction and principles of sustainability.

Tourists, or demand-side stakeholders, have their own role to play in the sustainability equation of tourism destinations. Their impact is visible through their consumption behavior, but also through the attitudes they show during their visit to the destination. Previous studies show that appealing to tourists' environmental values does not lead to changes in their behavior during their stay (Dolnicar et al., 2016). Although visitors are rarely motivated to learn (Ballantyne, et al., 2008) or engage in sustainable behavior while travelling (Dolnicar et al., 2016), efforts should be made to preserve cultural and natural heritage for the greater good. Changing visitor behavior can be enforced through rules and regulations (the hard way) or through the use of techniques that increase visitor awareness and thus bring about changes in visitor behavior (the soft way). For example, authors such as Dolnicar et al. (2016) suggests different approaches where tourists feel certain benefits from their environmentally friendly behavior and approaches where they do not feel constrained or feel that their holiday enjoyment is somehow affected.

Literature provides an alternative way of engaging tourists that can stimulate their interest in the environment, but without diminishing their enjoyment, and instead providing them with a memorable experience: interpretation.

Interpretation is a complex form of communication, defined by Tilden, the father of interpretation, as *an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, first-hand experience and illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information. Interpretation is revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact.*

David Uzzell (1998), Professor of Environmental Psychology at the University of Surrey, UK, mentioned that interpretation is *stuck in a rut where the how has become more important than the why*. In other words, Uzzell draws attention to the need to understand the importance of interpretation because it inevitably affects the obtained results. Researchers have responded to this call by looking not only at how interpretation can be done, but also at the



benefits it can bring to the tourism industry, demonstrating the importance of interpretation as a tool in visitor management.

This article aims to answer both of Uzzell's questions by reviewing the literature that has dealt with interpretation in tourism. It will present the main roles that interpretation can play as a mediator in the relationship between destinations or tourist attractions and tourists (why?), as well as the optimal ways of interpreting that can lead to more efficient results (how?). Following this analysis, a series of conclusions were drawn.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Interpretation and its role in visitor management

In order to respond to Uzzell's (1998) call to identify the significance of interpretation in tourism, we undertook an analysis of the academic articles that have examined this topic over time. Although Roberts et al. (2014) suggest that a consensus on the importance of successful interpretation has yet to be reached, previous research identified several roles that interpretation can take in order to reach recognition. These roles or functions of interpretation can be grouped according to whose interests they are aimed at: on one hand, there are functions that consider visitors and increasing their satisfaction by providing interpretation services that complement the basic tourist experience, and on the other hand, there are functions that address the needs of destination management or tourist attraction.

In terms of the interests involved, Ablett & Dyer (2009), in their article *Heritage and hermeneutics: towards a broader interpretation of interpretation*, argue as well for and highlight the importance of a subjective approach to interpretation. Subjective interpretation is when the interpreter leaves room for the recipients of his message to draw their own conclusions *without prescribing what they should think*; it is a form of interpretation that encourages critical thinking and is deeply ethical. In the above-mentioned article, this type of interpretation, with its subjective character, is called hermeneutic interpretation. This approach is based on the active involvement of visitors and their intrinsic motivation.

Interpretation can also have an objective character when the interpreter aims to lead visitors to certain conclusions and to change their behavior. In this situation, interpretation is seen as a management tool. Ablett & Dyer (2009) accuse this approach of being persuasive and manipulative. However, we should be cautious in judging the managerial approach too harshly.



Ballantyne et al. (2021) point out that few visitors translate their behavioral intentions into long-term environmental actions. The impact of tourists on tourist destinations has become very high and eco-friendly behaviors have become imperative.

To achieve this goal, educating tourists is fundamental. Interpretation has been recognized in literature for its educational role (Ababneh, 2021; Ballantyne et al., 2014; Apps et al., 2017). Freeman Tilden, in his book *Interpreting our heritage*, (1977) presents in a very beautiful way how interpretation works by going through its educational component: *through interpretation, understanding, through understanding, appreciation, through appreciation, protection*.

Education is about sharing knowledge and its assimilation by the educated. Interpretation offers a new approach to education, different from the formal approach and necessary given the context in which it takes place. Ham (1992) points out that interpretation differs from environmental education in that it is delivered informally to people in their spare time and, as such, should be fun and enjoyable.

Through its educational nature, interpretation can increase tourists' awareness regarding environmental issues (Ababneh, 2021), the negative impact that the tourism industry exerts, and the actions each individual can take to protect the environment. Apps et al. (2017) provides a very insightful example in his research that focused on shark-based tourism, exposing that interpretation can clarify prejudices about sharks and raise awareness that shark species are endangered and need to be protected.

The need for education is not only from the destination to the tourists, but also the other way around, as tourists want to gain new and valuable information about the places they visit. Davis (2004) identified learning, experiencing the past and having fun as the top three priorities for visitors to historic sites, and education and entertainment were cited as basic requirements for visitors to feel their visit was worthwhile. Interpretation can also respond to the desire of tourists to educate themselves, thus helping to meet their needs. In this way we come to talk about another important function of interpretation: increasing visitor satisfaction.

The influence of interpretation on satisfaction has been a theme explored in many scientific papers, unanimously concluding that interpretation can exert a positive influence on visitor satisfaction (Ababneh, 2017; Apps et al. 2017; Ballantyne et al., 2014; Ham & Weiler, 2007; Lee, 2009; Huang, Weiler, & Assaker, 2015; Pearce & Moscardo, 1998; Mancini, 2001).



In the tourism industry, achieving tourist satisfaction is very much about the ability of the interpretation to be entertaining, and depends equally on the expectations tourists have. From this point of view, it is important to be able to anticipate these expectations, and to consider, as well, the context, which can either support the interpreting experience or, on the contrary, be a major impediment to the interpreting process.

Visitor satisfaction may in turn influence other factors such as the intention to revisit and the intention to recommend the destination or tourist attraction to others. Whereas in the past, the ability to direct others to a tourist attraction was limited to a few people in the immediate entourage, now, through social media, a post can be seen by dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people in a very short time. From this point of view, the satisfaction of each individual tourist should be a desideratum, because the multiplier potential of people has increased enormously. Analyzing interpretation from this perspective we can also conclude that interpretation can indirectly influence tourism revenue, following the scheme: interpretation - satisfaction - return/new visitors - additional revenue (Botha et al., 2016). By influencing satisfaction, interpretation also contributes to changing perceptions of the price-benefit relationship (Ababneh, 2021).

Going beyond the managerial perspective, customer satisfaction is the intrinsic desideratum of tourism activity, and any means that can contribute to achieving this desideratum should be exploited, including interpretation.

For a destination to be sustainable, in addition to the satisfaction of tourists, or demand side stakeholders, we must also consider the satisfaction of other stakeholders, supply side stakeholders and, more importantly, the long-term viability of the destination. From this point of view there is a contradiction between the need for sustainability of the destination and the negative impact of the tourism industry. To meet this need, there should be changes in tourist behavior. Interpretation is seen as a soft means to bring about changes in tourist behavior, as an alternative to the rules and constraints approach.

From a managerial perspective, interpretation is seen as a tool that mediates communication with visitors and can bring about changes in their behavior. The influence on visitor behavior is not direct but occurs at different levels. On the one hand, literature has identified the potential of interpretation to influence visitor attitudes. Attitude, as it is captured in the Theory of Planned Behavior, is seen as a predictor of behavior. On the other hand,



interpretation can facilitate tourists' understanding of simple actions they can take to minimize their impact while travelling.

The literature has also analyzed the relationship between satisfaction and influencing visitor behavior. In this regard, Hwang et al. (2005) identified that visitor engagement in a national park increased with their level of satisfaction with park interpretive services. Similarly, Lee & Moscardo (2005) concluded that there is a link between visitor satisfaction and pro-environmental attitudes.

Weiler & Ham (2010) discuss that interpretation can impact tourists from three perspectives: cognitive, conative and affective. While the first two perspectives, the cognitive component, through the educational nature of interpretation, and the conative component, through its potential to bring about changes in tourists' behavior, have been addressed so far, the affective component, which refers to the creating emotions through interpretation, is now to be analyzed. Previous studies talk about the fact that visitors have started to expect from guides not only information, but also that guides elicit emotions (Poria et al., 2009).

Beck & Cable (2002), in their article *The Meaning of Interpretation*, make a number of references to the affective potential of interpretation, bringing interpretation back to the idea of revelation, as described a century ago by Mills (1920) and a little later by Tilden (1977). By revelation we mean that interpretation succeeds in surprising and arousing the amazement of the receivers of the message. From this point of view, the content of the interpretation must bring something new to the audience, information that is not normally very easily accessible, thus interpretation becomes a process by which tourists are guided to a deeper understanding of the place they visit and gain a new perspective of the world (Carr, 2004). Constructing such messages involves extra effort on the part of the interpreter, but providing such novel details can create a connection between visitors and the destination visited. This link has the potential to increase tourists' appreciation of the tourist experience (Weiler & Davis, 1993) and can be realized by facilitating interaction between visitors and the visited place (Ablett & Dyer, 2009; Moylan, Brown, & Kelly, 2009).

Apart from the revelation perspective, interpretation is seen in literature as an art (Mills, 1920; Tilden, 1977). Interpretation can be considered an art because it has a subjective character, both at the level of the interpreter and the receiver. Interpreting differs according to the personal context, experiences, knowledge, imagination, creativity, and tenacity of the



performer (Beck & Cable, 2002) From this viewpoint, the performer becomes an artist, a creator of content with strong emotional impact and characterized by a strong creative spirit.

Also, Beck & Cable (2002) bring a novel view of performance to the table. They believe that interpretation can give hope. The feeling of hope can be related to behavior change because without hope that something can be improved, the motivation to act can disappear. In order to convey a sense of hope, interpreters themselves must possess it, in the sense that they must intrinsically feel that things can take a positive turn and that through their work they can impact the attitude and behavior of tourists.

Another perspective places interpretation in direct relation to the tourist experience, considering that the main objective of interpretation should be to create valuable experiences for tourists contributing to their satisfaction (Rojas & Camarero, 2008).

The literature provides sufficient arguments in favor of interpretation as a tool for addressing tourists. The ideal situation and intrinsic purpose of interpretation is to create benefits for both sides of the barricade: for visitors and for the destination or tourist attraction. The functions of interpretation are interrelated and should be addressed simultaneously so that the benefits achieved meet expectations. From this point of view, although a priority, it is not enough to simply answer the question why interpretation is important, but we also need to identify how to do interpretation so as to optimize the outcomes.

2.2. Optimizing interpretation

Interpretation is a creative and personal process (Ababneh, 2017). Beck & Cable (2002) highlight this by saying that *each interpreter will interpret it differently, just as each person will respond differently to the interpretation*, which suggests that we cannot standardize interpretation, but what can be done to optimize interpretation is to follow certain principles or rules, which have been validated over time through empirical research. In addition to principles of interpretation, the effectiveness of interpretation is determined by the content of the information and the media through which it is communicated (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Ham, 1992; Moscardo, 1996; Powell, Kellert, & Ham, 2009). The way interpretation is carried out influences the experience of visiting and the value of the tourist attraction or destination (Ababneh, 2017).



2.2.1. Principles of interpretation

Over the years, authors who have focused their attention on interpretation have formulated, in addition to definitions for the concept, also principles of interpretation that contribute to a better understanding of the term and facilitate its operationalization.

Freeman Tilden (1883 - 1980) was one of the first authors to address the subject of heritage interpretation in his book *Interpreting our heritage*. Tilden formulated six principles, which are taken as reference points in the analysis of interpretation. However, Tilden's followers have brought their own perspectives to the concept of interpretation. An analysis of the different approaches reveals many common elements which the authors have expressed in various forms. In the present analysis, we will group the principles formulated by authors who have approached the topic of interpretation according to similarities, but also pointing out different perspectives.

A common element in the approaches to interpretation concerns its role in educating tourists. The need to educate tourists comes primarily because of the intensive development of the tourism industry, which generates not only economic benefits but also negative impacts on tourist destinations. From this point of view, tourists must be provided with information on the specifics of the destination and the behavior they should adopt, so that their impact on the destination and the locals to be minimal. On the other hand, by educating tourists, information can be provided on the values, history, traditions, and customs specific to the destination, so that they can share with tourists the identity of the destination, thus creating memorable experiences for them.

Although authors have agreed on the fundamental role of interpretation as a tool to educate visitors, given that tourism is considered a hedonic activity, interpretation should take on an enjoyable, fun, humorous form, (Ababneh, 2017; Apps, et al., 2017), and the message should be informal, avoiding resemblance to formal educational processes (Weiler & Ham, 2001). Moreover, simply listing data, or conveying raw, unprocessed information, cannot be considered interpretation (Ababneh, 2017).

Another important role of interpretation is to create a connection between visitors and the visited site. This is in line with the implementation of sustainability principles in tourism. Interpretation researchers suggest that in order to create this connection the interpreter needs to link new information to the visitors' prior knowledge. This is also important in terms of



facilitating understanding and because it makes it easier to understand and learn new information. The first principle of interpretation, formulated by Tilden, emphasizes precisely the importance of adapting interpretation according to the characteristics and background of visitors. Moreover, the message must be relevant to what visitors already know and to their interests (Apps, et al., 2017; Ballantyne et al., 2008), tailored to their motivations and characteristics (Apps et al., 2017).

In order to tailor the message, it is necessary to know the target audience from several perspectives: expectations (Botha et al., 2016), reason for visit, previous experiences (Moscardo, 1996), prior knowledge, preferences, cultural context, values, environmental attitudes (Ballantyne, et al., 2014). Thus, the *one size fits all* approach is avoided and the interpretation starts from the visitor's perspective. In other words, it creates tourist-centred experiences. A relevant example of this is the 2021 article by Ballantyne et al., which presents a model for grouping visitors according to motivations and values, outlining four categories of values: conservation, self-enhancement, openness to change and self-transcendence. In focus group interviews, specific characteristics were identified for each value group that can be taken into account in constructing interpretive models to streamline the results (Ballantyne, et al., 2021). An idealistic model of interpretation is when the interpreter becomes a co-creator of the interpretation, with communication being bi-directional, from interpreter to visitor and vice versa (Weiler & Black, 2015) Moscardo (1996) mentions the same in one of the four principles of interpretation he formulated, saying that visitors should be given the opportunity to control the interpreting experience.

In the same note, interpretation is defined as a form of targeted (mission-based communication) and bidirectional communication: on the one hand visitors should express their interests, and on the other hand the tourist attraction or destination should follow and manifest its specificity (site mission, destination values, management objectives). In order for the tourism experience to be sustainable and for the benefits to be shared by both sides, the two perspectives must find common ground through communication. If this communication, especially from the destination or tourist attraction to the visitor, succeeds in arousing positive emotions and creating links at the cognitive level, we can say that we are witnessing an interpretive experience (fig.1).

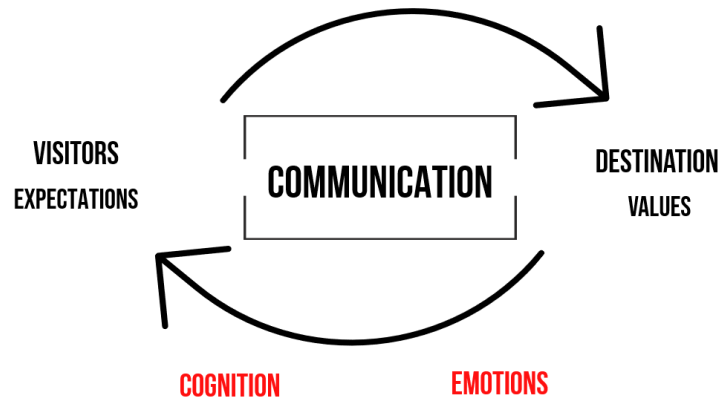


Fig. 1 - The interpretation process

Ballantyne et al. (2003) points out that in creating the interpretive message, both management needs and available resources must be taken into account, as well as the needs of visitors and their availability in terms of time, interest and even financial disposal.

Another form of grouping tourists is based on socio-demographic characteristics: age, level of education, residence, and others (Botha et al., 2016).

Although the literature frequently mentions the importance of adapting the interpretive message to the audience, Ababneh (2017) acknowledges that this is difficult to achieve through the diversity of visitors.

Tilden's second principle speaks about the fact that interpretation should inspire and be revelatory. Similarly, other authors such as Ballantyne et al (2011) or Ababneh (2017) evoke that interpretation should generate awe and excitement through the information provided, thus creating emotions. Just as music is made up of sounds and pauses, similarly in interpretation there is a need to interrupt the speech to allow time for reflection - the time when events, feelings are processed and brought into the conscious mind, being integrated with previous knowledge, and determining future decisions. Ballantyne et al (2021) suggest that reflection could be the link that creates the connection between tourists' experience during the visit and their subsequent behavior.

Previous research has also focused on other aspects related to streamlining interpretation such as using clear and simple content (Ababneh, 2017), whereby technical, scientific, historical data are presented in a common language and set in context, creativity, and



diversification of interpretation methods (Ababneh, 2021) and the inclusion of physical activities (Ababneh, 2017). It is also noted that interpretation should provide simple and feasible suggestions for action (Ballantyne et al., 2008), thus involving experiential learning, which implies 4 steps: actual experience, observation and reflection, abstract conceptualization, conscious experimentation, and repeating the cycle (Ballantyne et al., 2011).

The hermeneutic perspective on interpretation proposed by Ablett & Dyer (2009) has its own set of principles, coming with a broader, expanded view of interpretation that allows and encourages the infusion of subjectivity. The relationship between interpreter and visitor is placed in asymmetry, through the desire for greater visitor involvement. Hermeneutic interpretation comes with a philosophical approach that creates multiple interpretive perspectives, but it is also an inclusive experience that proposes reflection and dialogue, a holistic, experiential view that encourages critical thinking. In terms of encouraging critical thinking, Apps et al. (2017) suggests that through interpretation visitors should be encouraged to *think on their own rather than simply teaching them the facts and creating questions in participant's minds*. The hermeneutic perspective is in line with Tilden's vision, being a holistic, educational, artistic, and deeply ethical approach (Ablett & Dyer, 2009)

2.2.2. Interpretation media

In addition to aspects of creating the interpreting message, the manner in which the interpreting message is delivered also plays an important role in the success of the interpreting experience.

Interpreting is a communication process that involves the transfer of information from the speaker to the receiver through the use of a channel. Interpreting can be verbal/personal/guided, or non-verbal/impersonal, depending on the presence or absence of one or more people in the interpreting presentation. Authors such as Ababneh (2017) consider verbal interpretation to be more effective than non-verbal interpretation in that it can generate a more comprehensive understanding. Ababneh (2017) points out that personal interpretation plays a key role in meaning-making. Moreover, the same author argues that guided interpretation is more effective in increasing visitor satisfaction compared to unguided interpretation. Morgan and Dong (2008) reached the same results. However, in terms of knowledge gain, changes in



attitude and changes in behavior, no major differences were observed between the two types of interpretation (Ababneh, 2017).

In opposition to the view that personal interpretation is more valuable than non-personal one comes the research grounded by Reino, Mitsche & Frew (2007), whose conclusion is that visitors who had an interpretive experience using technology were more satisfied than visitors who went through a face-to-face experience.

The simplest form of verbal interpretation, not so much in terms of content but in terms of the resources involved, is verbal presentation, which can take the form of a talk (Ababneh, 2017), (Apps, et al., 2017), actively engaging visitors or telling a story (Ababneh, 2017). Stories are considered to be one of the most effective interpretive methods for enhancing the tourism experience (Ababneh, 2017). For effective verbal interpretation, the guide or interpreter needs to know some specific techniques. Ababneh (2017) talks about several elements that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting verbally. Firstly, the interpreter must ensure that the message he or she conveys reaches the receivers. From this point of view, the interpreter has to be careful about the volume of his voice and his positioning so that he makes himself seen and heard by everyone. Further, the interpreter can make use of various tricks that attract the attention of the receivers of the message, whether it is gesticulation or the use of various vocal techniques (Ababneh, 2017). Additionally, it is considered that successful interpretation should leave room for further discussion. It is recommended that the interpreter should solicit feedback and encourage questions, as well as intersperse the interpretation with moments of pause where visitors can freely interact within the destination or attraction being visited (Ababneh, 2017).

In the interpretation process, the guide or interpreter can make use of auxiliary materials: maps, brochures (Ababneh, 2017), displays, films, images (Ababneh, 2021), symbols (Apps, et al., 2017), and in the context of current technological development, the involvement of new media technologies can be even more effective. Interpretation can be facilitated when the interpreter has a prop at hand, or the interpretation process takes place in a special environment such as visitor centers (Ablett & Dyer, 2009). Moreover, more complex personal interpretation can involve conducting activities with visitors such as: craft lessons, guided tours, completing questionnaires, picnics, treasure-hunts (Ballantyne, et al., 2008), workshops (Ababneh, 2021) or interpretation through gamification, effective in arousing emotions (Jacobs and Harms, 2014;



Hofman et al., 2021). In these contexts, one can also make use of sensory stimulation: sight, sound, smell, tactile sense (Ballantyne et al., 2011).

If we refer to non-verbal interpretation, this can start even before the visitor arrives at the destination. The easiest way to do this is through websites. A positive example of this is presented by Albrecht & Raymond (2021) who analyzed the national pledges model. Iceland is one of the countries that has implemented this model, introducing a section on the destination's website that challenges future visitors to pledge for certain norms. The process is informal, and the statements used are in the 1st person with a touch of humor that makes it fun to go through. The use of printed materials or audio-visual materials also comes under the heading of non-verbal interpretation.

Analyzing all these aspects of the medium of interpretation, we can conclude that, on one hand, there are many elements of detail that can determine the success or failure of interpretation, but at the same time there is a very wide range of possibilities that leave room for the interpreter's creativity.

2.2.3. Planning interpretation

Ham et al. (2005) proposes a set of eight steps through which the interpretation process is structured and through which the construction of an effective interpretation is facilitated. A first step refers to the inventory of resources, which should not be seen only from the perspective of reviewing the available attractions but involves more than that: documenting the subject of interpretation by identifying the history, ethnographic research to find myths or legends, and the perspective of locals on the subject of interpretation. A concern of the interpreter should be to ensure the accuracy of the information used in the interpretation process.

Following on from this, Ham et al. (2005) suggests setting objectives. If we speak from a managerially oriented perspective, the formulation of interpretation objectives should take into account the strategy of the destination or tourist attraction and, moreover, should also aim at educating tourists in sustainability values.

Step three refers to identifying the visitors and it is in accordance with the principle of tailoring the interpretation message to the target audience. From this point of view, marketing research can be aimed at identifying existing visitor segments.



Step four is to establish the expected results and how these results can be measured. In this way the objectives become measurable.

Based on the resources available and taking into account the proposed objectives, in step five the topics for interpretation will be developed, and in step six the media matrix will be designed. That means to establish through which channels the interpretation will be achieved.

The interpretation plan includes the collection of all the elements listed above: available resources, objectives, target audience, expected results and all the themes formulated, together with the possibilities of concretization through media channels.

A final step refers to evaluating the interpretation in terms of expected results. The evaluation results should be used to improve, where appropriate, the interpretation experience.

Although there are many suggestions that can be taken into account in building a successful interpretation experience, the results of interpretation depend on many variables. For this reason, research in the field of interpretation in tourism may need to continue, exploring the topic from a variety of perspectives, including social and psychological.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The intention of the present paper was to group the perspectives addressed in previous studies in order to create an overview of interpretation in tourism. In order to have as broad a view as possible, we decided to answer both questions mentioned by Uzzell (1998): why interpretation and how to do it?

As far as the importance of interpretation is concerned, several functions that interpretation in tourism can assume have been analyzed and presented throughout time. On one hand, we talked about the educational role of interpretation, which can simultaneously respond to tourists' need to learn more interesting information about the place they are visiting and to connect with it, and on the other hand, to the need for destination management to educate tourists about the behavior they should assume during their visit and about their environmental, social and cultural impact, which must be minimized in order to achieve sustainability. From this point of view, interpretation aims to influence tourists' behavior during their visit, which some authors consider to be undesirable because of its manipulative nature.



On the other hand, interpretation should be an element of entertainment for tourists, creating an informal educational context in which tourists can acquire new knowledge through enjoyable and entertaining experiences that will ultimately increase their level of satisfaction.

The ultimate objective of interpretation is to create a win-win situation for the stakeholders in the destination, whether demand side stakeholders (tourists) or industry firms, locals, destination administration and others.

Although imperative, it is not enough to know the role of interpretation without also knowing how to use this tool effectively. To this end, researchers in the field of interpreting have tested various hypotheses on how to optimize interpreting. We certainly cannot talk about interpretation without bringing new information to increase the level of knowledge of tourists and without aiming to create a connection between them and the destination. The information conveyed must be relevant to the receivers. From this point of view, it is important to know the motivations and expectations of visitors, as well as other demographic characteristics that can differentiate them. The interpretive message should be simple, but it should be able to create emotions and connections at a cognitive level.

Just as important as the message itself is the channel through which it is delivered. Two broad categories stand out here: personal vs. non-personal interpretation. The literature has not reached a firm conclusion on the effectiveness of one over the other, but for each there are a number of recommendations that can be considered. Similarly, eight steps have been formulated that can help manage the interpreting experience: taking stock of resources, formulating objectives, identifying the audience, establishing expected outcomes, developing the interpreting themes and channels used, compiling the interpreting plan and evaluating.

Freeman Tilden states: *I've been working with the concepts of interpretation for about 25 years, and I still don't know what it is though I've got some ideas and I've written a lot of definitions. But I was never completely satisfied with them.* Similarly, Beck & Cable (2002) conclude with the idea that *a precise definition of interpretation is just beyond reach.* Considering Tilden's message and the efforts of his predecessors to facilitate the understanding of interpretation, we realize that it is a very complex tool, and the present work does not claim to have been able to fully cover this concept. However, looking at the results of previous studies, we can conclude that interpretation is an extremely valuable tool but, as with any type of art, it requires study and thorough preparation beforehand.



CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM: The authors declare no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

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